



# South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs

## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

(For more information contact: Tommy Windsor 803.898.5617)

### **Department of Disabilities and Special Needs Names New State Director**

**(Columbia, SC - September 27, 2021)** – The Commission for the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs announced the selection of Michelle Gough Fry, J.D, PH.D, LL.M as state director of the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. Dr. Fry assumes her duties effective October 11, 2021.

As the Chief Executive, Dr. Fry will lead the agency that plans, develops, oversees, and funds services for South Carolinians with severe, lifelong intellectual disabilities, autism, traumatic brain injury, and spinal cord injury and the conditions related to each of these four disabilities. Appointed by the state’s Commission on Disabilities and Special Needs, Dr. Fry has authority over five regional residential centers and all services offered through contracts with local disabilities and special needs boards and other service providers.

“We are very fortunate to have Dr. Fry directing our team at DDSN,” said Stephanie Rawlinson, DDSN Commission Chairwoman. “Her executive leadership experience will help us move the agency in the right direction and solve complex problems so that we can provide the very best services to assist all people with disabilities and special needs in our state.”

Dr. Fry has spent most of her professional career advocating for equity and access for students with disabilities and working with historically marginalized populations. She has served as General Counsel to the Indiana State Board of Education, General Counsel to the Indiana Charter School Board, and General Counsel to the Indiana Department of Education. In 2014, she was appointed by then-Governor Mike Pence to serve on the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, and she is the author of several publications addressing the civil rights of those with disabilities.

Her dissertation, which addressed students with disabilities and their experiences, was recognized by the Education Law Association with the prestigious Joseph C. Beckham award. Dr. Fry earned her doctorate from the Indiana University School of Education and her law degree from the Indiana University School of Law. She also holds a Master’s of Law degree from Georgetown University School of Law.

“I am honored to serve Governor McMaster, the Commission, and the individuals and families served by DDSN,” said Dr. Fry. “I look forward to advancing the mission of the agency by drawing upon my years of leadership experience as General Counsel for three state agencies and taking the agency in a stronger, more progressive direction to better meet the needs of those we serve.”

She is married to Dr. John Fry, MD, Director of Interventional Cardiology at Regional Medical Center in Orangeburg, South Carolina. They have four children and reside in Columbia.

###